

German police hunt train bomber after devices found

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DORTMUND, GERMANY - A day after the discovery of two unexploded suitcase bombs on the German railways, federal prosecutors took charge and launched an anti-terrorist inquiry Tuesday.

The railway station in the western city of Koblenz was evacuated Tuesday afternoon after lost-and-found staff noticed a gas canister inside a bag that had been handed in the previous day.

City police said all train traffic in the vicinity had to be halted while bomb disposal proceeded.

On Monday, bomb-disposal experts used water jets in the city of Dortmund to dismantle a suitcase containing a timer, gas and petrol.

A train conductor found that suitcase

Monday afternoon behind a seat on the lower deck of a double-decker train that shuttles a three-hour route between two western cities, Aachen and Hamm.

He handed it in to a railways lost-and-found office in Dortmund, where staff called police after peeking inside. Prosecutors said the 11-litre canister of butane gas and nearly 5 litres of petrol inside could have maimed or killed if it had exploded in a crowded carriage.

Federal prosecutors in the southern city of Karlsruhe said they were investigating the existence of a possible terrorist organization because of the temporal proximity of the two finds.

They added they were still investigating whether the suitcase bombs had been similar to one another or were capable of detonating.

Dortmund police said earlier they remained uncertain whether the device there had actually been primed to go off. They said the attacker or attackers could have been either criminals or politically motivated.

Juergen Kleis, head of the team of detectives on the case, said in Dortmund that German police had never had a case like it and the first step would be to profile possible offenders.

Dortmund police were not even sure at what time of day the suitcase was left on the train, which had been on the move since dawn.

Last year a businessman who had tried to extort money from a German bank was jailed for 12 years for leaving a bag packed with explosives in Dresden railway station in mid-2003. His detonator malfunctioned and that bomb failed to explode as he had planned.